



OP-ED

Office of Congressman Ed Schrock

Virginia's Second Congressional District

Peace, freedom, & progress in Iraq –

The untold story

By Congressman Ed Schrock (R-VA)

Recently, I joined ten other Members of Congress to visit our troops and those working to restore order in Iraq. What I saw there was amazing. However, when I returned home and saw and heard the media stories about Iraq, I wasn't sure I had actually been there. Except for the fact that I was in Iraq and know the truth, I would conclude that we are losing the war and the peace. But we are not.

There are many good and positive changes occurring in Iraq almost daily. The most remarkable and most appreciated change is the fact that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. He clearly made the Iraqi people live in fear.

But the remnants of the Hussein regime still exist. For instance, the main hospital in Baghdad is a disgrace, a place I would never allow any family member of mine go. Forty babies are born there daily and many die because of the deplorable conditions. Only since our troops arrived have conditions started to improve. The mortality rate is dropping as better equipment and training, and more skilled physicians are provided – all with American help.

Five miles from the historic city of Babylon, we visited one of the 59 mass graves that has been discovered. That grave contained the remains of 3,000 Iraqis. To date, 2,100 have been identified and returned to their families for burial. There were still 900 unclaimed bodies in clear view of where we stood that await identification and a proper burial by their families.

There are a total of 300,000 missing Iraqis. With each new discovery of another mass grave that number shrinks, bringing closure to many families.

The bright spot to this rather bleak description are the men and women in our military who not only liberated Iraq, but work every day to bring peace to this deserving country. Our men and women have repaired the power system so now light and air conditioning abound throughout Iraq. The sanitation and water systems that were in total disarray just three months ago are becoming more and more operational.

Our men and women in uniform are reopening schools so all Iraqi children may attend school. Our troops have rebuilt and reopened the police academy in Baghdad so that Iraqi's can be trained to provide for their own safety and security.

Everyone in American should be proud of what our troops are doing there. They are the best and there are none better anywhere else in the world. They do their jobs in intense heat under the most difficult circumstances and they do it because it's the right thing to do. And they will all tell you that, too. Is morale perfect with our troops? No. But they have been trained well and are coping as we would expect.

Every Iraqi we talked to thanked us and told us to thank President Bush when we see him next. To a person, they all begged us not to leave their country too early. That is their greatest fear.

(cont.)

Iraqi's want freedom and are enjoying what they have of it right now, but they are afraid we will "cut and run" as some in Washington have already suggested. We cannot and we must not leave until the job is done.

The initial battle was quick and decisive but achieving the peace in Iraqi will be long and difficult. Clearly, Saddam Hussein must be caught and our troops are working everyday to find him. But Americans must simply be patient as our troops complete their mission.

History has shown us that achieving the peace can be an arduous task. Iraq will be no different. But when total peace finally comes, it will have been worth the cost it has taken to get there.

Maybe by that time the news reports will finally show that peace is being achieved in Iraq and that American men and women in uniform are making it all happen.

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